

The Fiery Tryal no f strange thing;

DELIVERED IN A

S E R M O N

Preached at

CHARLSTOWN,

FEBRUARY 15. 1681.

Being a Day of

Humiliation:

By SAMUEL WILLARD Teacher of a Church
in BOSTON in NEW ENGLAND.

Matth. 10.41: *I think not that I am come to send peace on Earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.*

Vel resignemus Christianam militiam. vel parati simus ad
quavis pro Christo tribulationes ferendas. *Musculus.*

BOSTON In NEW ENGLAND

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TO THE

READER

Christian Reader,

There is nothing, more perplexeth a Believer in his race of Godlineſs, than to meet with, & be engaged in such difficultyes as he allotted not upon: Those that promised themselves a fair, & easy way in the service of Christ, when persecutions arise, anon they are offended in Him: Our Saviour therefore adviseſh every man that will undertake to be a Christian, first to ſit down, & conuict the Conſcience. The ensuing Discouerſe will acquaint you with one of the hard Lessons of Religion, and tell you what you may rationally propound to your ſelves, as likely to meet withall between this, & glory: Nor is this to discourage, and make you to repent, as of an hard bargain, (for an Eternal weight of glory, will more than compenſate all the tribulations you can go through, in the way to it) but to call you to preparation: that the newneſſ of it may not amuze you, nor the greatness of it affright you. How ſeaſonable ſuch a word is, let the Times ſpeake. If what is here ſpoken may in any wife help your Faith, it ſhall not be labour lost; which that it may, I commend it, & you to the Grace of God, who am
your ſervant for Christ,

SAMUEL WILLARD.

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I Pet. IV. XII.

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the Fiery Tryal, which is to try you, as though some strange thing hapned to you.

THIS Epistle (as is to be seen by the Title or Incription of it) was directed to Christians dispersed and scattered up and down the World. Whether they were the remainder of the Babylonish Captivity, who returned not with their Brethren into *India*; or the dispersion occasioned by the cruelty of *Antiochus*, in the dayes of the *Machabees*, of which the Apostle Paul, Heb. 11. 11. 35 &c. or those that fled in the Persecution raised soon after the death of *Stephen*: recorded Act. 8. beginning (to each of which Interpreters do differently incline) I determine not. But they were such as laboured under the exercise of manifold afflictions, as appears from Chap. 1. v. 6. now; &c. *you are in heaviness through many Temptations*. For their relief and encouragement our Apostle doth in every Chapter commix some consolatory and wholsome advise to strengthen and animate them to patience, and help their perfecting: and in the latter part of this Chapter, beginning at this 12th. verse, he more particularly counsels, and quickens them about this matter.

These words are introductory to the discourse, and taken by

themselves (and we need not at present look further) do contain an Exhortation or Direction, how to entertain the great Tryals that were like to come upon them; or rather a caution and negative injunction, or a prohibition, respecting the observation they should make of, and inference they might draw from those troubles. In the words observe,

1. The Compellation, *Beloved*: The afflictions of the Saints should not alienate our affections from them, or render them any whit less amiable in our eyes: there is no reason why our love should abate, or hearts grow strange to the people of God, because they are persecuted and hated by the World. Jesus Christ loves them, and declares them blessed, *Mat. 5. 10.* and if they are beloved by Christ, they deserve it of us, if we would be like him: nay their sufferings are for Christ, and on that score ought they to be dear to us, as they stand up for his honour: nay and they are for the Church of Christ too, *Col. 1. 24.* we have our share in the benefit, which challengeth for them a share in our love.

2. The subject matter about which the Exhortation is given, *viz.*, the *Fiery Tryal*: the word (πέμπειν) signifies burning, and so it is Translated, *Rev. 18.9.* Thus also some render it here. It designs the more sharp and severe exercises of affliction, such as are occasioned by the violent oppression and persecution of Enemies, which are frequently in Scripture phrase expressed by the Metaphor of Fire, from the manifold resemblance which is between them: it is here translated *Fiery Tryal*, respecting the end which God looks at in ordering it to befall his people, and that is further expressed and amplified in the description; *which is to try you*; the Greek is, *which befalls you for a temptation or tryal*, intimating to us the great design of God in all, even the severest Afflictions which his Children suffer; nor is it a vain Tautologie, but a needful amplification; flesh and blood being very ready to count of it as rather to destroy, then to prove their Faith.

3. The Exhortation it self: *Think it not strange*, the word is

is, be ye not like to Gheists or Strangers, and it is used for those which are troubled with admiration at some new and strange thing. The Apostle therefore expounds himself at the latter end of the verse: *As if some strange thing had hap-
pened unto you.*

2. Or, *as if a Stranger came to you*: so some read it: and his meaning is, that they should not entertain it as a thing which they had no expectation of, and were thereupon moved with wonder and surprize at the coming of it.

I shall not here endeavour to express all that might usefully be observed from the words, but among many Truths that might hence be treated of, make choice of that comprehensive one, for our present meditation. *viz.*

Doct. It becomes not the people of God to look upon the fiery tryal which befalls the Church of Christ in the world, as a strange thing. We may take up the Explication in three things: 1. What is meant by fiery tryals? 2. What it is to count them strange? 3. The ground of the Doctrine.

1. What is meant by fiery Tryals?

A. Tryals in propriety of speech, are such experiments as are made, for the finding out of the nature, qualities, and operation of things, when they are applied, in our speech, to rational agents, they then intend, either an Essay or Endeavour to draw, and by Arguments to periwade men to any thing which we have a design to make use of them in, and so they are called temptations, and in which sence mainly, the Devil is called the Tempter, because he useth all endeavours to insinuate into, and gain men to follow his suggestions: or else a proof which we are minded to make of the fidelity, sincerity, and constancy which is in a person, that we may know him the better, and so they are more peculiarly called Tryals: in this sence it is said, A wise man will try before he will trust; thus God put Abrahams faith and obedience to the tryal, *Gen. 22. beginning.*

Afflictions in Scripture language often bear the name of tryals; because by them proof is made of Professors, and men are tried so as to be discovered, oftentimes, whether they be indeed sincere or hypocritical; and indeed it is one of the best evidences we can have of mens integrity, when these drive them not from, but establish them in their profession.

When the Epithete *Fiery*, is added to tryals, it serves to denote such afflictions as are the most sharp and severe, and do the most of all put a Christians constancy to the test: and among these, the Apostle (as by our Context is manifest) doth here intend, such as are occasioned by persecution; those things which the people of God are called to suffer in defense of the Gospel, against the cruelty of raging Enemies; of which sort are imprisonments, stripes, revilings, exile, confiscation of goods, and the like: these are called fiery, metaphorically, because such is the pain, grief, and trouble which they put the mind of man to, and sometimes his body also, as render them exceeding difficult to bear; and because as fire they serve to purge and cleanse them from many pollutions: yea, and sometimes they are so termed Properly, because the Persecutors of the Church, do often prosecute the true professors of Jesus Christ with Fire and Fagot: and they are called Tryals, because (whatsoever the Instruments of them aim at in executing them upon the people of God) they are designed by God himself, who is the Sovereign and Supreme disposer of all things, to be probationary, and used as a Refiners fire to purge out the dross, and not to wast the good mettal which is cast into it, *Mal. 3.3.*

2. What it is to count them strange?

A. We look upon such things to be strange, which are,

1. Things unusual, and with which we have no acquaintance: such things as rarely happen, as scarce come once in an age, are esteemed to be strange things: a man whom we never or seldom saw before, and with whom we have not taken up any familiarity or friendship, is usually counted and called

called a stranger : familiarity and strangeness are opposed each to other : so that then we count the fiery tryal a strange thing, when we look upon it as a thing unusual, a thing not wont to befall the people of God, a rare thing ; so the phrase is used, Luk. 5. 26. *we have seen strange things to day :* such as ages have not produced the like.

2. Things unexpected; such as come upon us at unawares, which we did not so much as dream of ; it never entred into our thoughts to look for, and apprehend any the least probability or likelihood of such events. Those things which we do expect, they are not strange to us when they come, and that because we were in our expectance familiarized with them ; but when they come suddenly , they surprize us : when we expected and promised our selves to live at ease, and not to be molested, and now trouble comes, we are amused : and thus strangeness is opposed to expectance, so it is used Job. 33. 3. *a strange punishment to the workers of iniquity,* i.e. such as they were secure in their thoughts against, and siezed on them unlooked for.

3. Things whereof we cannot give a reason : the cause of them is hidden from our cognizance, and we understand not either whence they come, or what they come for ; strange and admirable are sometimes used synonimically, so the word is used, 1 Pet. 4. 4. *They think it strange that you run not,* &c. i. e. they wonder at it, and think there is no reason for it: now admiration is a suspension of the understanding, when we see an effect, and are not able to dive into the caute of it: when we see that a thing is, and then sit down and consider either whence, or why it is, and cannot satisfie our selves about it, we then wonder, and place it among the number of strange things: and such an Opinion had the Psalmist conceived of the fiery tryal, Psal. 73. 16. *When I thought this.* i. e. the reason of these dispensations forementioned, it was too painful for me ; his understanding was not able to bear the disquisition.

4. We shew that we look at things as strange, when we carry it to them as unto strangers ; and that is in two things principally ;

1. When we suspect them to come for no good to us, but rather for mischief : Jealousie is a frame or disposition, wherewith we do frequently entertain strangers : it is very natural, and therefore usual for us to think of such, that they have some evil design upon us ; which jealousie occasions us to keep a critical eye upon them, and warily to watch all their words and actions, yea their very looks and gestures ; and let them pretend to never so much friendship, yet we are hard of belief, thus *Hanun suspected Davids Servants* : thus *Jacob looked upon his Afflictions*, when he concluded *These things are against me*, Gen. 42. 36. and *Zob* when he uttered that complaint, Job 19.11. *He hath also kindled his wrath against me, and he counteth me to him as one of his enemies.*

2. When they are a burden and wearisomeness to us, and we had rather have their room than their company : and this is a fruit of the former ; for when we expect no good by them, but suspect some design of evil upon us from them, it makes their presence a burden and grief to us ; and this puts us upon it to desire, and eagerly long for their departure, and if they tarry long we are quite tired out with them, and would use any course to be rid of them, they are such unwelcome guests to us : thus did *Hezekiah* Isa. 33. 13. *I reckoned till morning, that as a Lion he will break all my bones : from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me.*

3. For the ground of the Doctrine : or why it becomes not the people of God thus to esteem of the fiery tryal ; this is evident upon a double account : For so to think is both in it self unreasonable, and also prejudicial to the people of God.

1. It is a conclusion very unreasonable, there is no just reason to be render'd for such a thought : if we will ponder every circumstance, we shall see it evident that it is not a strange thing

thing in it self, and must therefore be irrationally so judged by us; For,

1. It is no unusual thing, but very frequent: we have the Saints of all ages for examples; there is a whole cloud of witnesses testifying to this truth: ever since righteous *Abel* lost his life for Christ, to this day, there hath been in all ages almost more or less of the fiery tryal upon Gods Children: it was thus with *Israel* in *Egypt*, who were made to serve in hard labour, and in cruel bondage, and are therefore represented as a bush on fire and not consumed: yea their whole passage through the Wilderness, what was it, but a going through fire and water: So the Psalmist expresseth it, *Psal. 66.12. we went through fire, and through water.* And besides the fires kindled upon the Church, particular Saints have their fires also to try them: sore and sharp afflictions, this is *Davids* complaint in respect of himself, *Psal. 57.4. My soul is among lions, and I lie even among them that are set on fire.* Nay God speaks of his Church as a place where he constantly keeps a furnace for their tryal; hence he makes it a paraphrase upon his name, or one attribute whereby he may be known by us, *Isai. 31.9. the Lord, whose fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem.*

2. It cannot rationally be looked upon as an unexpected thing. This will appear, (if laying aside all other grounds of it) we only consider that God hath forewarned his people of it, and told them that it shall be: for either we must think that he speaks not as he intends, and so would deceive us with vain fears, or else that he is ignorant of it, and so we must deny his supream providence in all these events, or else we must take his predictions for evidence of the futurity of it: the Scripture frequently puts us in mind of, and counsels us to prepare for such times: it declares it not only as a thing possible, which yet should prevent our security; or probable, which yet will put a wise man upon expectation; but future, or a thing which must be, it was one of the last warnings

which our Saviour Christ gave to his Disciples, and with which he closeth up his last Sermon to them, just before he was taken from them, *Joh. 16. ult. In this world ye shall have tribulation.* The Apostles of Christ looked upon it as a necessary Doctrine to be taught all the people of God, and were therefore careful to instruct them in it in all places where they came, *Acts 14.21,22. That we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdome of God.* Paul ascertains *Timothy*, that it is a Catholick verity, a thing to be expected by all, as being equally extensive to a godly life, *2 Tim. 3.12. Yea and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution.* So that not to expect it, is an implicate denial, at least calling in question of the truth of the Gospel.

3. Neither is the reason of it abstruse or difficult, but if we look into all the causes of it, we may discern sufficient ground for it: For,

1. If we consider the principal agent in it, who is God, (for it is his sovereign providence, which determineth and disposeth of all the changes which come over his people) it follows from his infinite wisdome, goodness, and love to his Children, so far is it from contradicting any of these, (whatever prejudices the carnal reasonings of our dark under standings may take up) as will appear, if we consider the use and improvement which he makes of it: our Text informs us, that it is to try them, in which tryal (like a refiner) he makes his own people more fit for the use and service of their Lord and Master. For,

2. By it he burns off the dirt that clave to them: Metal when it is first taken out in Ore from the Mineral, hath much of heterogeneous matter (dirt and filth) cleaving to it, and that the fire burns off: so do these fiery tryals that come upon the Church, they make it too hot for nominal professors to abide by it; as close as they seemed to cleave to the people of God in a seeming Profession before, now they must fall off; the stony ground is offended when tribulation and persecution ariseth, *Mat. 13.21. Hypocrites cannot long abide the fiery trial,* but

but when it grows hot upon them, they relinquish their Religion, and comply with the World, to avoid trouble.

2. By this also he separates the dross from the good metal: when the dirt is removed away the metal indeed looks brighter, and makes a fairer shew, but yet there is a great deal of dross and dregs in it, which render it less precious, and more unserviceable, but the fire melts that out, separates it, and leaves the rest by far more pure: there may possibly be abundantly less of it, but that which is, is of a great deal more value; the people of God themselves have much of dross and corruption cleaving to them; and that especially in times of outward peace and prosperity, but when God brings a sore tryal upon them, it refines and purgeth them: this is the very design of God in these dispensations, *Isat. 27.9. By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and all the fruit is to take away sin.* And chap. 1.25. *I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away thy sin.*

3. Yea, and by this too, he melts down the good metal: the fire prepares and fits the metal by melting to take any form, to be cast into any mold which the Founder designs: by sore afflictions the people of God are made more humble, and made pliable to any Command of God: they are sometimes stiffe and inflexible in dayes of prosperity, but now they subject themselves to the framing hand of God, and are ready to receiue his stamp and impression, *Zech. 13.9. I will refine them as silver, &c.* and what then? why now they shall call on my name, and shall say the Lord is my God.

2. If we consider the procuring cause of it, and that is the sin and provocation of his people. Sometimes indeed God sends it meerly as probationary, so he did to Job, but usually there is something on our part, putting some sort of necessity upon God to proceed in this way with us: the Church of God here hath its converse in an evil World, where, by reason of the remainders of indwelling corruption, apt to take the infection of many temptations, they are contracting a great deal of filth and pollution, so that their necessity

seemeth to call for a fiery tryal, to burn off their cords of vanity, to purge and purifie them from these corruptions. They that are acquainted with their own hearts, and know how much they have dishonoured God in dayes of peace, quiet, and liberty, will easily judge and acknowledge that it is not without very just ground, and good reason that he often brings trouble and persecution upon them. The Prophet therefore pleads it with the people of God, *Jer. 2. 17.* *Hast thou not procured this unto thy self? & 4. 18.* *Thy way and thy doings have procured these things unto thee.*

3. If we look upon those that are the instrumental causes of it, which are Satan and wicked men, neither herein will it appear wonderful; either,

1. That they are ready and forward to afflict and persecute the people of God: he must needs be strangely unacquainted with their native malice, that thinks it is a strange thing: it hath been a truth from the beginning, that the World ever hated the Church: they hated Christ first, and thence it is no wonder if they hate his people too: our Saviour Christ to shew what entertainment his Disciples are to expect in the World, compares his people to Sheep among Wolves, *Mat. 10. 16* *Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of Wolves.* And the Wolf seeks no other quarrel against the sheep, but that he is a sheep, and if he can, will devour him, right or wrong: to be a servant of Jesus Christ, a sincere Professor of the Gospel, is enough to stir up the hate and malice of the World: *Cains Sejus bonus homo, sed christianus,* if they can in no other point charge them, yet this very name renders them odious: its charge enough if they can charge them in the matters of their God: and we may as well wonder, why Serpents hate men, as why the old Serpents seed hate the seed of the Woman. nor,

2. That God useth them as instruments, neither is this any wonder, since they are the fittest materials to make his rods of: these are rods which will smart most: their hatred makes them

them most ready to afflict and chastise the Church withal : it is true, if they were principal agents, and left to a& their own pleasure they were very unfit, for they think only of the ruine and desolation, but not of the tryal and reformation of the People of God; but as instruments in the hand of God, they will make it smart, but cannot do any hurt : agen, they are therein the fittest to make rods of, that when God hath done with them, and chastened his People by them, they may be thrown into the fire : yea in this respect God makes eminent discovery of his infinite wisdome in the choice of Instruments, because in this way he takes an advantage to prove the reality of his love to his people, then when he is most angry with them. It is therefore worthy our diligent observation, that though God be never so angry with his people, and cause his wrath to burn never so high against them, yet then he so loves them, that he will be avenged on the very Instruments of his displeasure upon them, and therefore makes choice of his, and his Churches Enemies to punish them withal : why doth God call Babylon to *come down and sit in the dust?* *Isai. 57.1.* we have the reason rendred in ver. 6; *I was wrath with my people, and gave them into thy hand, and thou hast shewn them no mercy.* Though Babylon did no more then what God both intended and threatned : there cannot be a more manifest token of men hated by God, and appointed to destruction, then to be raised up to be persecutors and oppressors of the Church and People of God, whatever their iniquities and provocations may have been.

4. If we consider the end of these fiery tryals, and that ariseth from the improvement which God, who is the prime agent in them, makes thereof, and it is to be discovered and observed by us in the operation ; the substance of it is, it is to make his people more humble, more holy, more serviceable to the glory of his own great Name, more profitable in their generation, and better fitted and prepared for the Kingdome of glory, Moses summs vp all briefly, *Dent. 8.16.* Where having

having given an account of the difficulties, and fiery tryals, which *Israel* met with in the Wilderness, he certifies them that the design of all these was only this, *that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good in thy latter end.*

2. It is prejudicial to the People of God: for them to place such an account upon the fiery tryal is much to their disadvantage: for that,

1. It tempts us to rob God of that glory which is his due, and we ought to give him in the fires: God expects to be glorified by his people, but whiles we look with amazement, and these things astonish us,, we are more ready to dishonour him, by calling his wisdome, love, goodness, truth, &c. into question, if we count the fiery tryal strange, we shall answerably have strange thoughts of God, and hard thoughts of Religion, so he, *Psal. 73.13. & 77.8,9.*

2. It will wonderfully weaken our Faith in God, our trust and reliance on his promises, it confounds faith when a soul knows not what to make of things: while *Jonah* is amazed, he begins to draw up a conclusion of desperation, *then I said I am cast out of thy sight*, *Jon. 2.4* Faith must have its evidence, *Heb. 11.1.* which is lost in these transports.

3. It will fill the soul full of jealousies and strange suspitions, ready to say of every cross and trouble, this is certainly against me: he will take all for Enemies, and think God so too, and say as he, *thou settest me for thine enemie.*

4. It will make the tryal by these means far more grievous and hard to bear, it will fret and vex the Soul, raise disquietments and discontents; we shall behave our selves like *Ephraim, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke*, *Jer. 31. 28.* here is the very reason of all the unruly carriages of the people of God at any time under their afflictions, because they have not a right apprehension and opinion of them.

5. And from all these, we render our selves exceeding uncapable of receiying Counsel, or Comfort: if God send us

us advise, we cannot hear it, if consolation, we cannot receive it: thus we read, *Exod. 6.9. Moses spake unto the Children of Israel, but they hearkened not unto Moses, for anguish of spirit, and for cruel bondage.* Now all these things damnifie us, & so prevent that good which otherwise we might derive to our selves from these exercises, how sharp soever.

Use. To wave other things, let me apply this truth for the helping of our faith unto a suitable improvement of the fiery tryal which any of the people of God are at this day labouring under; and which we our selves also have weighty reasons to live in the continual expectation of; that so we may not so think of it, or entertain it as a strange thing: and to that end that we may have a right judgement, and soul satisfying apprehension of it, let us diligently and prudently compare the works of Gods providence, with those intimations which are given us in his word, and it will afford us a true and a full discovery of the true meaning of these things, and that in both respects.

1. It may satisfie us in regard of that sore persecution which is at this day upon divers of the Protestant Churches abroad: we hear of many sad and sorrowful calamities which by the malice of Satan, and rage of men, are brought upon that cause, and are ready to sit down as men amazed, wondering why this is, and wherefore God suffers it, how Jesus Christ can bear it: let me assure you, it is not because God doth not own and approve of that cause; it is his own, he hath born, and will bear witness to it; it is the cause which shall stand when all other shall come tumbling down into ruine: nor is it because God hath cast off his people whom he hath chosen; for his love to his Saints is unchangeable, inviolable: nor is it because he approves of, or takes delight in the contrary prevailing interest, though they indeed make their boast of their successes, and pretend the offering up the liberties and lives of Gods people, to be a sacrifice of thanks-

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giving therefore; no; Gods curse is on them and their cause, and in due time their foot shall slide. It is then none of these; But,

1. The Scripture tells us of a time wherein Satan is to be let loose, in which he will rage extreamly against the Church, *Rev. 12.12.* and these are some of those dayes wherein these things are to have their accomplishment, as relating to the persecutions which Antichrist was to raise and continue against the Saints of the most High. It is true that the rage and malice of Satan and his Instruments are always eagerly bent to ruine the Church; yet are they tyed up by the Sovereign Almighty Power of God, *who stillereth the noise of the seas, and the tumults of the people;* yet if he please to give them leave, and lengthen their chain of restraint, as he did in *Jobs case,* they will vent it to the utmost of their advantage and opportunity: it is a certain truth, that Satan and his Agents have no other stnt or bounds of their malice then the limits of divine permission, they ever do as much as they can, & that they do no more is because God hath an hook in their nostrils; now God doth sometimes, for ends infinitely wise, give them leave to do a great deal, and vent abundance of their spleen against his People.

2. God wills that at sometimes the truth be sealed to by the sufferings of his own people, as well as owned by their Profession, that he may make the fulfilling of that truth gloriously resplendent, *Mat. 16.18. The gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.* The trutn of the Gospel is never more honoured in the World, then by faith and patience of suffering Saints; they then glorify God, and his name is magnified, when his honour, and the profession of his name, and vindication of his truth is more dear and precious to them then their own lives, and they can readily sacrifice them, in the de-sense of it: hereby their faith appears in its vigour, and it is seen how powerful the spirit of God in them is: the tryal of their faith is a most precious thing, better then that of gold,

I Pet. i. 4,7. and herein the excellency of divine love makes it self eminent, in that many waters cannot quench it.

3. It is certain that the Protestant Churches abroad in the World have given God a great deal of provocation, by manifold enormities and scandals that have discovered themselves shamefully amongst them. If the judgement of those be right, who conjecture the seven Churches in *Asia*, to whom *John* wrote, Rev. 2, & 3. do stand for an emblem of the various estate of the Church to the Worlds end, they seem now in these dayes to be fallen under the last and worst paettur, lukewarm *Laudices*: it is too true and manifest, that there is but a little true zeal stirring for the glory of God; though there be abundance of formaliy: there is but a very little of the power of godliness to be seen, but a great many wickednesses growing and abounding: such prophanation of Gods holy Sabbaths, that in many places they are disowched, and the morality of the fourth Commandment not only called into dispute, but wholly renounced; abundance of covetousnes, uncleanness, prophaness, and many other provoking sins, such as an holy God, will not, cannot bear in a people that are called by his name: they therefore stood in need of a fiery tryal to purge and refine them: they have gathered abundance of dirt and dross, and it is not a small fire that will burn it off, and melt it out: and therefore at such times God is wont to set up his furnace, and provide hot coals for it, cruel and bloody instruments, to execute his just displeasure upon his own people by: thus he threatens *Israell* in case of Apostacie, Deut. 28. 49, 50. *The Lord shall bring upon thee a nation, &c. a nation of fierce countenance, which shall not regard the person of the old, and shew favour to the young.*

4. There is a time of reformation expected, and waited for by the people of God, and it is hoped not to be far off; and this is the very way in which God hath purposed to bring it about: when the Lord speaks of the happy reformation of the people of the Jews, he propounds such a method as this

to do it in, Zech. 13. 8, 9. two parts therein shall cut off, and die, and the third part shall be left therein, and I will bring the third part through the fire, &c. Gods work of reformation, as it is a glorious, so also it is a terrible work, a work which but a few will be able to endure : it is very probable that two thirds when they come near the fire, and begin to feel it scorch, will not bear it, but seek to avoid it : and thus we hear of many thousands in France that are daily renouncing the Protestant cause, and coming over to Popery, through fear and cowardize : and the other third part they must pass through the fire that they may be reformed, that when they are tryed, they may come forth as Gold : and is there any strange thing in all this ? hence therefore, that we may be settled and not shaken, let us carefully build upon these conclusions.

1. That the fiery tryal is intended only to try the Saints : it is not brought to destroy them, but only to refine and purifie them : were believers thoroughly perswaded of what God meaneth, by these things, they would not be so liable to those frights and amazements which distract and disturb them : our Text fortifies this conclusion, restraining them to this proper end and purpose.

2. That God overrules all instruments : yea, though, as they are rational agents, and causes by counsel of their own actions, they design nothing but mischief, yet he will use them as meer instruments in his hand, not to gain their own projected ends, but his, which they neither know nor design : they shall but do his pleasure, and not their own, Isai. 10. 7. *Ah Assyrian ! the rod of my anger :* what can a rod do without an hand to manage it ? no more can they but as God improves them : we look too much on men, and think their power is great, and rage implacable, and now what are we not to expect to suffer ? but remember, their wrath shall but serve to praise God, and the remainder he will restrain.

3. That Gods people, though in the furnace, are yet very precious to him ; yea that he chuseth them in the furnace :

Israel

Israel in affliction is often tempted to say, My God hath forgotten me; but God assures us that it is far otherwise: they are then as tender to him as the sucking child is to the pitiful Mother: you see how God thus expostulates the case with Zion in this regard, Isa. 49.14, 15, 16.

4. That the fiery tryal shall not be alwayes, but only for the appointed time, until it hath wrought out Gods gracious ends, and then deliverance shall come: God will not suffer the rod of the wicked to be alwayes in the lot of the righteous, he knows that if he should, the spirit which he hath given us, would fail and faint; he hath therefore promised that *he will not contend for ever, nor be always wroth*, Isa. 57. 17.

5. That during all that season wherein his people are in the furnace, he sits by and tends it. *He sits as a Refiner*, Mal. 3. 3, sitting notes a fixed posture; intimating that God doth not only come now and then, and occasionally take notice how the fire burns, and mettal melts, having mean while other things to divert and divide his care; but that he makes it his work and businesse to tend it, and therefore taries constantly by it; he throws in every coal with his own hand, and not one coal more then is meet and useful for the work. He useth his skill to make it melt down, and become fit for his Mold; he humbleth his people, and reforms them by their tryals, puts a virtue into them, or gives a blessing with them, whereby effectually and powerfully their corrections become instructions to them, and they are made the better by them: yea they are fisted and prepared to be taken out of the furnace again, and be vessels of honour, employed in the service of their Lord and Master.

From hence therefore we may be directed both how and what to pray at this day in the behalf of the Persecuted Church of Christ abroad in the World.

1. How to pray for them, i. e. in Faith; when a thing seems strange to us, it stirs up unbelief: when men cannot tell what to make of these providences which are in their view, they know not how to believe; they know not where to fix their faith: but when a child of God sees the evidence of things, he hath now the reason of his confidence before him.

2. What to pray: it will teach us not to over hasten God in his work, but to leave him to his leisure, who in infinite wisdom knows what he hath to do: when the fiery tryal looks strange, all we can think of, is the removal and taking of it away, and we cannot tell how to pray to God for any thing else, because we can see no good in the affliction: but when we are acquainted with the author, nature, and end of all these tryals, it will direct us first of all to pray that God would sanctifie it for the cleansing of his Churches; that he would purifie sons of Levi and reform the Protestant Profession in the World: the Church most of all needs our Prayers at this day, on this account; and then we may wait upon God for their deliverance.

2. It may advise us not to think it a strange or unlikely thing, that we ourselves may be brought under the fiery tryal, I am sure there are many awful symptomes of it, and more from time to time: yea we are likely enough to pull it down upon our own heads by our foolish divisions, and strange indiscretions: and ready enough we are to censure and charge one another in this kind; but there is an higher hand moving all these lesser wheels: and if we would look aright, the thing which should mostly awe and affect us is this, that we are become degenerate, we have backslidden and gone aside from God, we have lost our first love, we are grown dirty and drossie, obstinate and hard-hearted, and unwilling to be reclaimed: If therefore God should withdraw from us, and leave our publick affairs to miscarry in our hands, I would say it is of the Lord, that he might fulfil the words of his Ministers, that told and warned us of dayes of great calamity approaching;

proaching; because we would not hear them, and retain to our God: and let all such as fear God ponder of these things; look for, and see abundant reason to expect a winnowing time, a time of burping, a day of great tryal, that when it comes, you may not be taken at unawares, or (judging it a strange thing) be surprized with undue terrors and frights; but may with quietness and patience submit to the work of God in it: so shall you endure the tryal, and not be burnt up, as chaffe and dross, by it, but be brought out of it again with joy and glorying, inasmuch as it shall be accounted to you for a filling up of the sufferings of Christ, and shall contribute very very much to the compleating and enlargement of your eternal joyes.

F L O R I S

FRIENDLY READER.

The desolating Judgements by Water and Fire, with which God hath, and intends to cleanse the World; are in Scripture brought together, and made to illustrate each other. Wherefore be not offended at the remaining Page, as if its service were unseasonable, and out of place, wheras it relates (as well as it can) what the *Gazette* report concerning the terrible *INUNDATION* that the Low-Countries lately smarted under; and which was looked upon as one awful consequent of the late formidable *Blazing Star*.

Toward the latter end of January last, there having been for many dayes much Rain, and a violent Storm, sundry of the United Provinces, viz. Holland, Zealand, Brabant, Flanders, felt the direful effects thereof: For the Sea with wonderful impetuosity broke through and over the Banks, whitch the Low-Countries are defended with, unto the unexpressible Distress and Amazement of the Inhabitants. Many Villages were reduced to be wholly under water: even in great Cities the Waters ore flowed their Streets, and were divers foot higher than has been formerly known; so that Boats passed to and fro, where men were wont to walk. Persons were forced to ~~barricade~~ their Houses, and ge- into their upper Rooms; yea (in some places) to the tops of their Houses, where (tis said) some were famished to death. In some Churches the Water was above eight foot high, and Corps were taken out of their Graves, and car- ied away th rewith. Hundreds of dead bodies were seen daily floating down the River, to Antwerp. Many stately Fortifications were spoiled, and strong Walls beaten down. Sundry Places now overthrown, cannot in many years be recover- ed; and some never. The losses of one City have been judged to amount to some Millions. The sufferings of Merchants can not be related. Innumerable Cattel were destroyed. Some great Mens Estates were laid wholly under water: Noble and Wealthy Families are brought to Poverty. If we are not misinformed, above fourscore Lands and Polders have been ove- whelmed. And the Dutch have lost more by this Flood, than by all their late grievously expensive Wars. And (which is more tremendous) a vast number of People have lost their lives. In soine Islands, most of the Inhabitants; and in one Polder no les than a thousand have been drowned. In one Land where about a thousand dwelt; but one (like a *Job's* Messenger) escaped Death. Yea 'tis generally said, that near twenty thousand perished by this overflowing Scourge.

